

EDITORIAL

WHAT IS A VITAL SECRET?

DEFENSE "security" is one of the strictest and most frustrating features of a democracy. While all men of good will concede the necessity of guarding vital secrets, there is extreme difficulty in defining "vital secret" fairly and accurately. In our recent experience, there is no formal government censorship applied to the publication of information. There exists, however, a devious and capricious censorship applied through the workings of the Canadian Commercial Corporation which is the Federal Government's purchasing agency.

Let's take an example. Soon after the Canadair Sabre production program got started, the CCC gagged the Canadair personnel with a directive forbidding, in particular, any discussion of plant capacity, actual production, or potential output. The same rule was applied to Avro Canada. Presumably this information qualified under the "vital secret" definition. Then, in March, Rt. Hon. C. D. Howe, speaking in the House of Commons, made the following statement:

"We are now in production on the F-86E at Canadair. We have arranged for government-furnished equipment at the rate of 20 planes a month; and it is expected that over the next few months that figure will be the production output of the plant. As soon as our own jet engines are in quantity production... that production figure can be stepped up to 50 planes a month if required... At Malton the CF-100 is coming into production. It is expected that production there will be stepped up to 20 planes a month..."

Apparently this information was not a vital secret after all. Mr. Howe's statement must have been quite frustrating for the aircraft industry personnel, after their months of tight-lipped caution.

Consider another instance of inept censorship in action. The writer was able to obtain certain details concerning the Sabre for publication in an article heralding the first flight of the Canadian-built fighter. Acting under instructions, the company's officers had released the information only after our assurance that the manuscript would be cleared at Ottawa. It was submitted to CCC. It was slashed to a few newsless paragraphs. There was considerable horror because we had recorded the fact that the Sabre is equipped with fuselage dive brakes. There was chagrin because our report described detachment of the rear fuselage section to give access to the engine. We received a phone call from Ottawa conveying the CCC request that we promise to burn the original manuscript and all copies.

We had quite a little ceremony burning the manuscript. The solemnity of the occasion was relieved, however, by the knowledge that U. S. aviation publications already had published pictures and captions describing: 1. the Sabre's fuselage dive brakes; 2. the detachable rear fuselage section.

Confused, over-zealous, or poorly-informed efforts at censorship not only clog the channels of public information. They sap the effectiveness of legitimate security safeguards.

During the last war there was voluntary censorship which provided editors with broad directives defining the boundaries of vital secrecy, then placed on them the responsibility of avoiding transgression. This system worked because it was administered by qualified personnel. It was successful because it was realistic. If we are to have censorship now it should be clearly-defined, it should be stripped to essentials, and it should be non-political.

WINGS FOR CIVIL DEFENSE

THE role of aviation in civil defense will be one of the principal topics at the semiannual meeting of the Air Industries & Transport Association, about to convene at Harrison Hot Springs, near Vancouver, as this is written. It is fortunate that the AITA management has been able to obtain Major-General F. F. Worthington, M.C., M.M., civilian defense co-ordinator, from Ottawa, as a speaker.

It seems to us that the civil defense problem calls for clear thinking and the establishment of a sound basic organization rather than a sudden fever of enthusiasm and the creation of an intricate superstructure. All the indications are that the tension, and the danger, may last for years. The situation demands clear definition of the menace, the enlistment of vital services in a nucleus organization ready to expand and to cope with anticipated emergencies should they occur. It would be wasteful and futile, to marshal a vast corps of citizen volunteers rushing about with tin helmets and sand buckets. On the other hand, intelligent appraisal of potential target areas and planning of emergency services is of the utmost urgency.

In the event of a bombing attack on a target area, civil airplanes would be invaluable in maintaining communication and providing transport between the distress centres and the fringe or evacuation regions. This role of the airplane would be accentuated with the disruption of surface communication, liaison and transport. Civil defense is a provincial responsibility and it is probable that commercial operations will have an opportunity of working with local committees. The national co-ordinator of civil defense is charged with the responsibility of advising provincial groups and co-ordinating their efforts. It is fortunate that in Canada there are relatively few target areas tempting enough to attract the enemy. But this fact itself could be disastrous if it were to lull us into complacent neglect of civil defense preparedness.

CANADIAN AVIATION

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